

TEXT: Luke 13:10-17
THEME: Proclaiming release to the captives
SUBJECT: Education
TITLE: Set Free

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
25 August 2019
Messiah Moravian
Jerry Harris

Stanley cannot remember a time when he didn't have to work. His father and his uncles were brick layers. At age 8, Stanley, an only child, was taken by his father to work sites to learn the family trade. He began by mixing mud according to the specific needs of the brick. Softer brick required more moisture, harder brick less.

Stanley's parents were church going folk. His father served as general contractor for the building of the new brick fellowship hall which also served as worship space until the new sanctuary could be built. It was never built and Stanley would preach his father's funeral in that fellowship hall.

Along with learning how to lay brick, Stanley learned the language of the trade. Uncle Rufus, the best brick layer in the family, had the gift of creative cursing and could curse in sentences. Stanley knew he came of age when Uncle Rufus complained to his wife, Aunt Christine, that Stanley had cursed him out that day. Aunt Christine called Stanley's mother, complaining that he had upset Uncle Rufus.

That was not the last person Stanley upset by cursing. I was at a Moravian Ministers retreat where Stanley, the retreat leader, engaged in creative cursing five minutes into his first presentation. A bishop sitting next to me wrung his hands and muttered, "We are in the presence of evil." Another Moravian minister, now also a bishop, complained that in his tour of duty in the US Navy he never heard such language and he didn't have to listen to it now.

From a blue collar, working class family in Pleasant Grove, Texas to Durham, NC; from brick layer's apprentice to tenured professor and according to Rowan Williams, one of the greatest Christian minds of our time, Stanley has traveled a long way socially, culturally, intellectually. What made such a journey possible?

For most of his high school class, graduation was the end of their formal education. But Stanley's pastor told him he should go to college. No one in his family had ever gone to college. The only college graduates Stanley knew were teachers and preachers. He counts himself fortunate to have found a professor at his college who was a teacher. John Score, Stanley says, made my life possible.

John never told Stanley what to do, but he guided him through college and life. John's Introduction to Philosophy course made Stanley a philosophy major, the only one at Southwestern. John taught Stanley how to recognize the interdependent character of knowledge and virtue. Put simply, how we live affects what we can know.

The courses Stanley took with John were important, but just as important was John's willingness to include him in his life. Stanley slowly learned by John's example that to be a Christian meant you could never protect yourself from the truth.

A teacher made Stanley Hauerwas' life possible. He too became a gifted teacher, making possible the lives of many others. He has now shared his life story in *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir*. Several reviewers have compared it with Augustine's *Confessions*. All made possible by a teacher who knew the life of the mind and the life of the spirit are interdependent.

Now Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. A woman appeared who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. Jesus sees her, calls her over and says, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."

What her ailment was Luke doesn't tell us. He only tells us the reaction of the synagogue leader who does not celebrate the fact the woman can now stand erect and look him in the eye. Rather, he cites the law prohibiting work on the sabbath.

We need to understand that the law Moses received from God was given to create the conditions necessary for the flourishing of life; its purpose was to preserve freedom. Resting on the sabbath was a reminder to former slaves that they are more than their labor.

So this is no trivial complaint by the leader of the synagogue. Jesus reminds him, however, that he unties his ox or ass on the sabbath and leads it to water. This constitutes work, according to the law. Why is it okay to unbind your ass on the sabbath but not okay to unbind a woman on the sabbath?

Whatever Jesus was teaching before the appearance of this woman, the subject matter becomes proper interpretation of the law. Jesus sets the woman free from a crippling spirit and in the process reveals the spirit that cripples the leader of the synagogue. He cares more about his ass than he does a daughter of Abraham.

Jesus names him a hypocrite/charlatan. Luke tells us the leader and his cohorts are put to shame; their inadequacies are revealed in front of the cheering crowd. If you are going to embarrass the principalities and powers in public, you will be well advised to buy life insurance rather than invest in a 401k.

Complaining about Stanley Hauerwas' cursing while holding fundamentalist's interpretations of scripture is hypocritical. Fundamentalism is a crippling spirit. It is a perversion of the law's intent, the turning of a means into an end. As Paul put, "For freedom Christ has set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

You were created to stand up straight, to be free. A good teacher will liberate you from prejudice, from magical thinking, from delusions of grandeur, from crippling spirits. Let us rejoice and give thanks for the healing of mind and spirit made possible by the good teachers we have known!